

The Clipper Visits...Charles "Chuck" Foster

By MARTHA HIMES

If you've ever wanted to know what goes on behind-the-scenes at the Olympics, talk to Chuck Foster. He's heading off to Salt Lake City to play a major behind-the-scenes role in ladies' figure skating competition.

Unknown to much of the Olympic figure skating audience, each panel of judges is overseen by a panel of referees. Each figure skating event (men's, ladies', pairs and dance) has two referees. Foster will referee the ladies' division, assisting fellow referee Britta Lindgren of Sweden. . The official Olympic opening ceremonies kickoff two weeks of competition beginning February 8 with the ladies figure skating competition scheduled for Feb. 19 and 21.

Foster is one of five people in the United States qualified by the International Skating Union (ISU) to referee a World Championship or Olympic event. The ISU appoints the Olympic skating referees, only two of whom come from the United States. The other U.S. referee is Ronald Pfenning of Hyannis.

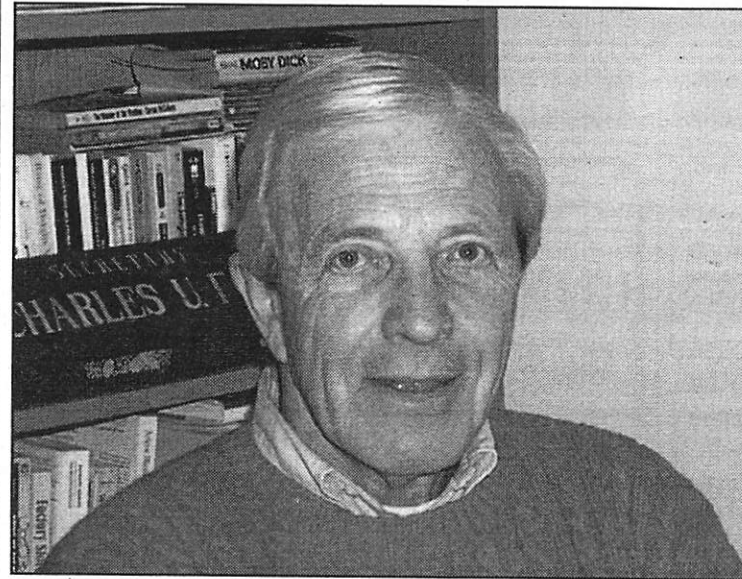
As a referee, Foster will oversee the judges, supervise the events and step in if problems arise. "The referees are in charge of the event. They are really the chairmen of the panel

praising the accuracy of each judge's scores. These reports are sent to the ISU's Technical Committee, which supervises the judges. If a judge is deemed guilty of national bias, or simply bad judging, the Technical Committee can penalize the judge. "There's a whole series of penalties, for instance, you'd get a probation, and then you'd get a letter of criticism, and if it keeps going on, ultimately you'd end up being dismissed, or fired for a year or so," Foster said.

The Technical Committee also supervises the referees, who can be censured for late, poorly written, or erroneous reports.

This will be Foster's first experience as Olympic referee. While it is not necessary to have judged at the Olympics before you can referee, he has done that, too, having served as ladies' judge at Lake Placid in 1980.

Foster's involvement with the Olympics goes back almost 30 years. He was elected to the Board of Directors of the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) in 1973. In 1988, he was elected to the office of Secretary of the USOC and served in that capacity at the Olympic Games in Lillehammer in 1994. He served as Secretary until 1996,



Chuck Foster of Surplus Street is heading off to Salt Lake City to assist with the Olympic figure skating competition.

know what day it is."

Foster's favorite country of those he has visited recently is Slovenia. While in the Balkans, he visited Bosnia Herzegovina, and stood on the site of Arch-

duke Francis Ferdinand's 1914 World War I-precipitating assassination.

Foster's career in figure skating began in Fargo, North Dakota, where he was born and

lived until he moved to Massachusetts for college at Harvard, from which he was graduated in 1956. Throughout college, he skated and competed with the Skating Club of Boston, along with his sister, Sidney, who attended Radcliffe and is now a local figure skating instructor. Now living on Surplus Street, Foster and his wife, Kay, moved to Duxbury after visiting Sidney and her husband, John Arnold.

"Figure skating has meant everything in my life," he said. "It meant that I came to school in Boston. It's given me continuing opportunities for many years....I've traveled everywhere, I've been everywhere there's a skating rink. But first in importance would have to be that I met my wife on the ice at the Skating Club of Boston."

During the event, the referees make such decisions as determining that the ice is ready.

"Once, a skater had a beaded dress on and the beads fell on the ice, so we had to stop everything and remake the ice," he explained.

If a skater has a technical problem, the referees determine how to proceed. "For example, out in California the music stopped for some reason... And so the skater stopped and came over and got a start at a certain spot."

The referees will also score each performance as if they themselves were judging. After each event, they'll meet to review the judges' marks, and compare those marks to their marks. A major concern is national bias, which, according to Foster, is easy to catch. If one of the judges differs dramatically in his scoring of a contestant, the referees can ask for a written explanation. Unfortunately for the skaters, though, the referees cannot overrule the judges.

"We can't do anything about the outcome of the event. We can't control the judges as they're judging.... Our marks don't impact on the results, but at the meeting, they have a great deal of impact on how things should have turned out," Foster said.

Later, each referee will write a lengthy, detailed report, ap-

which his team with the USOC ended. "Nobody gets more than two terms as an officer, eight years. You're lucky to get that," he said.

Foster now serves his sport, rather than the USOC. Toward that end, in late January he'll act as Team Leader for the United States delegation to the Four Continents Figure Skating Championships in Korea. He is involved on a daily basis with preparation for this trip, frequently on the phone with the United States Figure Skating Association office to straighten out skaters' hotel rooms and travel plans. The Four Continents Team is made up of the skaters who placed fourth, fifth and sixth at the National Championships in San Diego, which he also attended earlier this month.

When asked for his jet-lag recovery secret, the peripatetic Foster confesses that he is always jet-lagged. "We're all constantly tired. The skaters are tired. If you really charted what (Michelle) Kwan's been doing since August, she was in Australia for the Goodwill Games, she had to do two Grand Prixes, she did two Pro-Ams, she's done some shows, then she went to the Grand Prix final in December right before Christmas, then she has the Nationals now, and then she goes to the Olympics. Then she's done. (Irina) Slutskaya, the Russian, she must not even